



Department of Justice

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FOR RELEASE AT 9:00 A.M. E. S. T.

REMARKS OF

JOHN N. MITCHELL
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE
UNITED STATES

Before the

National Advisory Commission on
Criminal Justice Standards and Goals

Washington, D. C.

November 3, 1971

First let me welcome you to Washington and express my gratification at your willingness to serve on this important and timely Commission.

Your chairman, Governor Russell W. Peterson of Delaware, has shown himself dedicated to the effort to fight crime in his own state. Furthermore, as chairman of the National Governors' Conference Committee on Crime Reduction and Public Safety, he has translated his experience, concern and dedication to the crime problem nationwide.

On behalf of the National Governors' Conference, he testified earlier this year before Congress on LEAA programs, and he is quite familiar with this agency, its problems, and what is being done to solve them.

The Vice Chairman of the Commission, Sheriff Peter Pitchess of Los Angeles County, is widely recognized as one of the most capable law enforcement officers in the entire country.

And the range of backgrounds which the members bring to this Commission will certainly assure a comprehensive approach to the task ahead.

As you know, Americans are belatedly realizing that our criminal justice system today is mired somewhere in the last century. It has been ignored, starved for funds, and relegated to a second-class level of public interest. Those who have labored to improve matters have been frustrated by the heavy barrier of public apathy.

We are all aware of the difficulties police face in coping with rising crime, particularly in the large cities.

We are all aware of the problems that judges and court administrators face in trying to deal justly and fairly under the burden of outmoded procedures, overcrowded dockets, and appalling delays.

And we are today more than ever aware of the problems of our entire correctional system, which as President Nixon has noted, presents a convincing case of failure.

As you know, President Nixon gave first priority to the war on crime and the improvement of the criminal justice system. Besides a number of decisive steps to upgrade the Federal criminal justice process, he also asked for and received from Congress large increases in funds for aid to state and local agencies.

Four years ago the United States was spending seven million dollars a year on law enforcement assistance. Today we are spending one hundred times that amount. Since crime is primarily a state and local problem, most of this money is funneled through states and localities, because they best know their needs.

But if this massive effort is to result in actual reform of our criminal justice system, it is essential that state and local planners be given yardsticks to establish priorities, to set goals, to establish standards.

Last February I called attention to this need for national goals and standards in the operation of police forces, in the administration of courts, and in the upgrading of corrections systems.

I directed the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to provide the financial support and to take the initiative in this effort. State and local governments, criminal justice experts, and others would contribute their own personal experience.

LEAA has worked effectively to meet that obligation. Several planning conferences were held, which resulted in recommendations for the formation of this National Commission, which will direct the work of 12 task forces. These will operate in every area of the criminal justice system.

And LEAA is underwriting this effort financially, with support of approximately one and one-half million dollars.

The task of this Commission is to establish concrete standards and goals to allow the dozens of state planning agencies and the hundreds of regional planning agencies to measure the problems in their own areas, and to see how and where they are ahead of or behind these suggested standards, and by how much. Assuming that they accept the work of this Commission as offering authoritative standards and goals, they will then know exactly where they want to go, how to get there, how much it will cost, and how long it will take.

So the task of this Commission is nothing less than to provide a working blueprint for the reform of the entire criminal justice system-- police, courts and corrections--in this country.

How well you meet that obligation will help determine how long it will take to bring crime in the United States down to the level that may be expected of a mature and well-rounded society.

In my opinion, there is no more important task than that in America today.